

PO 101 L4 Purpose and Limits of Government

Circling Back to Game 1

OK. What does this game assume about the players? When will cooperation occur?

- Will only cooperate if it is in one's self-interest
 - Is this reasonable if the other player is a stranger?
 - Ignores people who help strangers
 - Most of our economic situation with strangers, though, are self-interested (e.g., minimize cost, maximize gain)

Impact of the facts of the game

- How could we change the facts of the game to make the players more likely to contribute? I did so by requiring taxes, but can we do something else?
 - Bonded by friendship or national identification. This can facilitate norms of reciprocity and generosity (e.g., I'll help out my fellow Americans or South Carolinians and contribute to the road).

Takeaways

Democracy: accountability between the public and politicians (e.g., citizens voting an incumbent, such as former President Trump, out of office in 2020; it will be interesting to see whether President Biden also loses re-election)

- Democracy can promote effective but limited government (politicians don't want to rob us of our rights; they want to earn our vote through effective management of the government and economy)

Federalism: the division of power across levels of government, with some powers shared across levels and others reserved for particular levels

- Shared: tax
- Reserved: local-level public safety

Separation of powers: the allocation of legislative, executive, and judicial authority to distinct branches of government, to prevent one branch from becoming too powerful. The Constitution vests primary lawmaking authority to Congress, primary executive authority to the president, and primary judicial authority to the Supreme Court and lower federal courts. But each branch also is able to hold the other two accountable through checks and balances.

Checks and balances: rules in the Constitution allowing one branch of government to check the power of another branch, thus promoting balance of power

- Goal: undermine tyranny
- List
 - o The president can check Congress by vetoing legislation
 - o The president can check the judicial branch by nominating federal judges
 - o Congress can check the president by ignoring the president's pleas for legislation or passing its own version of legislation
 - o Congress can check the president by overriding a presidential veto
 - o Congress check the president by rejecting cabinet appointments and court nominees
 - o Congress can check the president by impeaching and removing the president
 - o Congress can check the president by proposing amendments to the Constitution that reduce the president's power (e.g., term limits in the 22nd Amendment)
 - o The Senate can check the president by delaying court nominations
 - o The Senate can check the judicial branch by rejecting court nominations
 - o The judicial branch can check Congress by declaring laws unconstitutional
 - o The judicial branch can check the president by declaring executive actions to be unconstitutional
- Example: The Supreme Court's decision on TikTok

Other Key Concepts from This Lecture

Public goods: goods and services from the government that are available to everyone

- Contrast with private goods such as groceries, which are available for private consumption

Collective action problem: letting others pay the cost for a collective benefit

- You could sit home and let others vote for your preferred candidate or party. If you're a Republican in a strongly Republican state such as South Carolina or a Democrat in a heavily Democratic state such as New York, this may be an especially tempting option since you benefit in terms of policymaking and representation without paying the cost of going to the polls
- However, government can change incentives and help to solve the collective action problem. Australia, for example, fines people who don't vote (if they lack a good reason for not going to the polls)